

Staying Connected



There was something about Habitat for Humanity which attracted members of a 24- strong volunteer team from Saudi Arabia's Dhahran International School. For Tasi Mushannen, 16, Habitat's mission of helping people and her belief that everyone needed a decent home were a good match. To pay for her volunteer build in Katana Town in Negombo, Western Sri Lanka, she asked for donations from the local community. She also supported funding for her Global Village team-mates by taking part in walkathons, basketball tournaments, school dances and art shows.

From 13 to 20 February 2014, Tasi and 23 other student volunteers worked on 12 houses together with Habitat families. The volunteers' labor helped to reduce the cost of construction for the families. First-time volunteers such as Tasi found the experience of building a new room from scratch to be memorable. The local children were "fun to be around and so light-hearted", she said.

Tasi's team-mates also bonded with the local community. Tehreem Akhtar, 16, said: "They're really friendly people. The kids were really nice, making us necklaces and stuff." What mattered most to Tehreem was being physically involved in the work, instead of being an onlooker.

Ranjak Bhagwat, 16, joined the Habitat club at the encouragement of his relative. When he decided to go on a Habitat build to help others, he was not disappointed. The first day of the build was particularly memorable for Ranjak when the Habitat families saw the work which the volunteers did on the foundation of a house.

Yusuf Abou Ghanem, 17, was impressed by the teamwork and a sense of unity, not only among his team-mates but also the local people who chipped in to pass bricks. “We didn’t help a lot of people but we made a difference.”

Theodore Borgeding, a teacher at the school and a sponsor of the Habitat club, saw the build as a way of connecting with other cultures. According to him, the work done was of a more permanent quality and the benefits would remain with the people for a long time.

Towards the end of the build, the volunteers were motivated for the future. “Thank you Habitat for this experience! It’s been great and I hope to come back next year,” said Tasi Mushannen. Her team-mate Ranjak Bhagwat wanted to encourage his family and friends to follow suit. “They should definitely go on a Habitat trip. The people need it (housing) but it’s also a good lesson to us to value the things we have and appreciate it.”



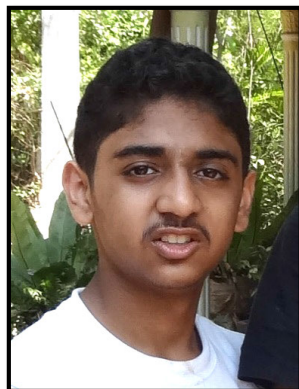
Mixing cement to plaster the walls of a house



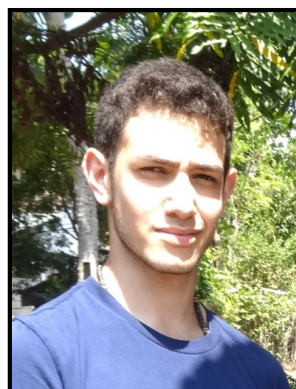
Transporting sand to make concrete



Tasi Mushannen



Ranjak Bhagwat



Yusuf Abou Ghanem



Theodore Borgeding